LOST TREASURES ON THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

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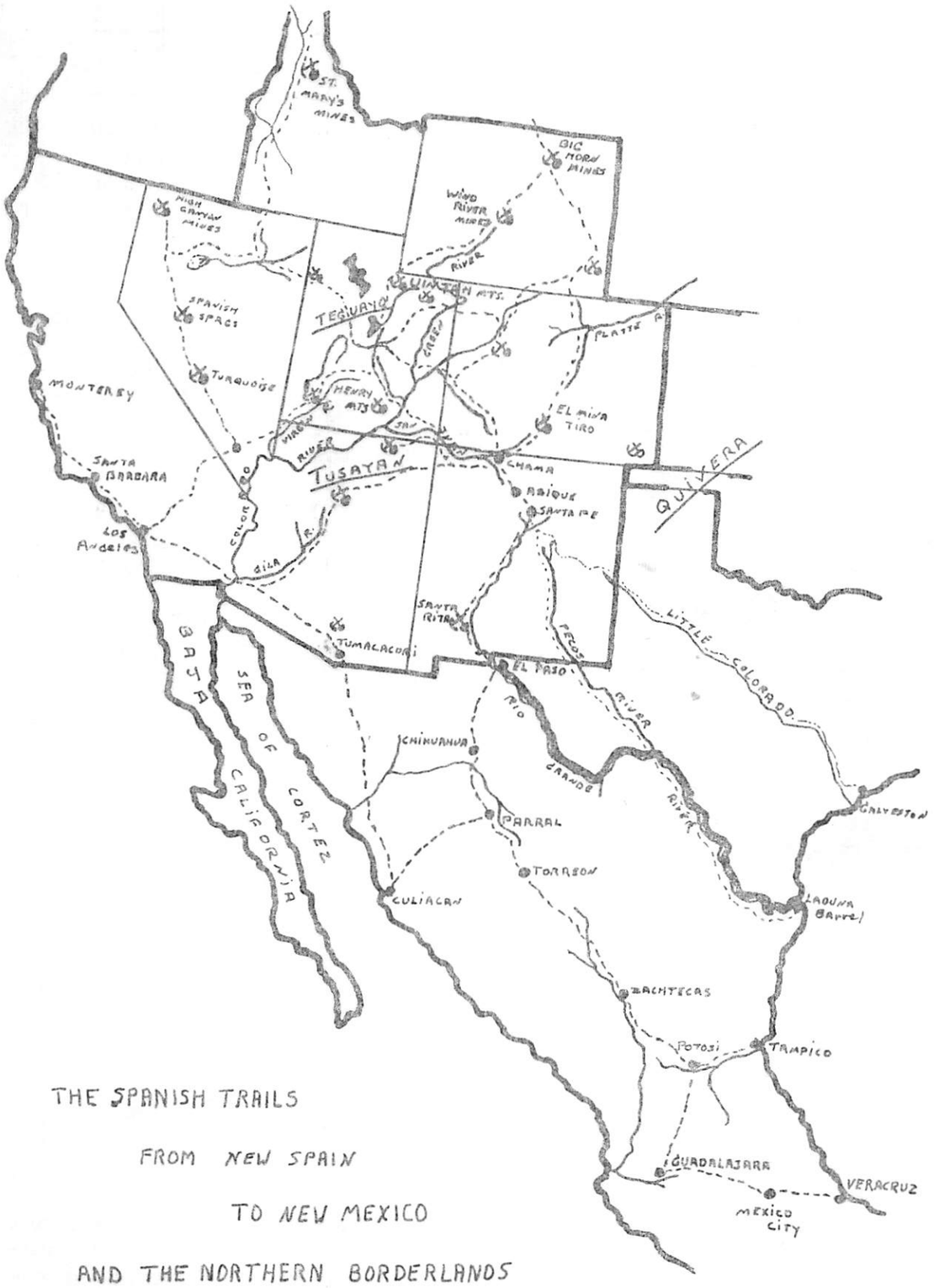
Daniel's Canyon Mine
(Wm Sam Bethers & Henry Beaver)



THE SPANISH TRAILS

FROM NEW SPAIN

TO NEW MEXICO

AND THE NORTHERN BORDERLANDS

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SOME LEGENDS COME TRUE

"Gold is where you find it."

—Old Miner's Proverb

El Mina del Tiro, the mine of the shaft, added as much gold and silver to the king's treasury as any Spanish mine. It was "a very old Indian mine" when first discovered by Espejo in 1580. Under Spanish supervision it was worked for 100 years, until the Indian revolt of 1680. By the time the Spaniards returned to the northern mountains every trace of it had disappeared, but a find made two centuries later may have solved the riddle of its strange disappearance. The discovery was made not far south of Westcliff in Huerfano County, Colorado, where one can look across the 14,000' peaks of the Sangre de Cristo (Blood of Christ) Mountains.

It is a land of legends and lost Spanish mines, including LaCaverna de Oro, the cave of gold. The cavern may be the long lost El Mina del Tiro. The cavern was discovered by Elija Horn in 1869. An early resident of that area, Horn was exploring what are known locally as the Crestone Needles, when he came upon a Maltese Cross cut into a ledge high on the mountain, by the side of a narrow slit-like opening. The opening had been covered with rocks in the distant past, but the whims of nature had loosened them enough to reveal an entranceway.

The gold is at the bottom of the shaft at El Mina de Tiro.

Horn was unable to descend the near vertical shaft inside, but he did explore a short side drift where he made a gruesome discovery, a skeleton in Spanish armor! Several arrowheads still lodged in the bones told the cause of death. Apparently Horn made no further attempt to investigate the shaft, and it wasn't until 1891 that a party from Denver led by Don De Foe explored a cave in the Crestone Needles, where they found four skeletons. Because there are a number of caves in the needles, it isn't known for sure that the cavern explored by De Foe was the same one found by Horn.

In 1919 an old Mexican woman, then said to be 105 years old and who lived five years longer, told a tale of a fabulous Spanish gold mine hidden deep in the mountains near the Crestone Needles. She told how her ancestors had been worked as slaves there in the long ago, and also how her people had risen up and drove the Spaniards from the mountains. The huge pile of gold the Spaniards were forced to leave when they fled was thrown into a shaft where priests had cut a cross into a rock ledge. All of their tools and ladders were dropped into the shaft and slide rock was pushed into it. There wasn't enough rock to fill the shaft, for it had been driven so high on the mountain that the waste rock made a long rockslide into the canyon below.

A party was organized to search for the place the old woman had described and as she had told, a portal was found, and by its side a faded Maltese Cross. The sides of the shaft were loose and dangerous, so that work had to progress slowly. Seventy feet below the opening a short side drift was found, and in it a crude log ladder which was later judged to be 200 years old. At 90 feet in depth the narrow pit opened into a 20 foot circular shaft.

In another side drift 300 feet below the collar of the shaft, an ancient hand forged hammer of seventeenth century design was found. The searchers were able to descend 500 feet before they encountered the loose rock which had been dumped into the shaft. The walls had giant slabs of rock so loose they could fall at the slightest touch, which prevented further exploration.

Records do not reveal any further exploration of the old shaft until 1932 when a party led by Peter Moser made a very thorough and painstaking investigation. With better equipment and lighting they discovered a nearly hidden side tunnel 400 feet below the surface. Carefully removing caved rock they inched their way forward for 50', where they made a grisly discovery. At the end of the tunnel they found a human skeleton chained by the neck to an iron ring set in the stone wall!

Also of interest is something else the old Mexican woman said. She recalled that much lower on the mountain a tunnel connected with the shaft bottom. A heavy wooden door which had been torn from the miner's mission had been placed over the tunnel entrance and then covered with large stones. Searchers climbed the sharp crags and loose slide rock, and about 1,000' below the shaft entrance they found the ruins of an old stone building, thought by some to be the mine mission. But search failed to locate the wooden door and tunnel entrance which would lead to the gold at the bottom of the shaft. Many believe that the old Mexican woman's Caverna de Oro and El Mina del Tiro are one and the same. Only time will tell.

An equally exciting discovery was made on Recapture Creek, a small desert stream which flows into the San Juan River near Old Fort Montezuma in San Juan County, Utah. When the first pioneers arrived at Fort Montezuma they found an old hermit already living there. It took some time to make friends with him, but in time he told them a tale that when the Emperor Montezuma's servant fled north to hide the royal treasure, he was recaptured at the little creek he called Recapture Creek, by which name it is still known today. It's doubtful that the settlers believed his story, but they had to believe the gold the hermit had, for in time they saw plenty of it. Whenever the old man needed supplies he would appear at either Bluff or the fort's trading post, where with a hand axe he would cut enough gol from a small bar to pay his bill. The bars wer about an inch square and six to eight inches long Those who saw them or the pieces he used to pa the trader with remembered that there wer Spanish numerals or letters on them.

The mystery of the hermit's gold excite attention again in 1905 when Andy Laney, a cowboy working for the Scorup Ranch nea Monticello, stopped to water his horse on Recapture Creek. Laney saw something shinin through the water, and investigating, he dug a ba of gold from the sand. It was about 8 inches lon and crudely cast, and had words and number which were strange to him, as well as a Catholic cross which he recognized. Laney lost no time selling the bar when he was offered $1,800 for it, more money then he thought existed. But the money was soon spent at the Blue Goose Saloon a Monticello or at other dives.

With a partner named Blaine, Laney returned to Recapture Creek. For weeks they searched fo another bar without luck, and then one day when they were about to give up, quite by accident Blaine stepped on a bar barely covered by sand about 100 feet from the creek. Digging furiously they soon uncovered four more bars, as well as a chunk of gold about the size of a clenched fist. They quickly went to their favorite saloon at Dolores, Colorado, where Blaine was killed while allegedly cheating at cards. Laney returned to cowboying when his money was gone. It was later reported that he was killed somewhere near Navajo Mountain by some of Chief Posey's outlaws.

That would have closed the mystery of the gold bars if two hunters looking for relics along Recapture Creek hadn't found two more gold bars in 1964. And a newspaper reported in 1979 how a man and his wife had camped overnight on Recapture Creek, and while using metal detectors to search for coins, found still another bar. No one can say for sure where they come from. Some believe the hermit's tale of Montezuma's treasure is true, but a more likely explanation might be that like the mule skeletons and gold ore found by Fremont, the gold bars of Recapture Creek are part of a Spanish gold shipment being packed from the Lost Josephine Mine to some gulf port. We do know one thing for sure, Recapture Creek is right

on the Old Spanish Trail!

You may not believe that Montezuma's Aztecs hid the emperor's treasure anywhere near Recapture Creek, but a lot of people at the little town of Kanab, just north of the Arizona line, think it was hidden not far from where they live. When Cortez fought his way into Mexico City for the second time, he discovered that most of Montezuma's treasure was gone. He learned that his servant had taken it far to the north to their ancestral home where it was cached in a secret cave. Although to some it may sound strange, many people at Kanab believe that some sort of Indian treasure is buried just north of their town.

The tale of Montezuma's treasure cave had its origin in the writings of Cortez's chronicler, who recorded, "The Emperor's servant Tlahuicle took many loads of gold and jewels so far to the north that no one could ever find it." In 1920 a character named Freddie Crystal arrived at Kanab and started asking questions about the mountains near town. He had an ancient looking map in his possession, which he said would lead the way to Montezuma's treasure. The map showed a place where petroglyphs would lead the way to a canyon having four forks, surrounded by four peaks, one at each point of the compass. In the center of the quadrant formed by the four peaks there would be a lone mountain, where the treasure was hidden in a cave. Old-timers familiar with the area studied Crystal's map and saw that it matched the exact topography of Johnson Canyon and the White Mountain!

With everyone anxious to help find the treasure, Kanab became a deserted village, with every able-bodied person hurrying to the new tent town erected at the edge of White Mountain. Just as the map directed, petroglyphs and ancient hand cut stone steps were found leading up the mountain side. They led to a place where the mouth of a tunnel was walled over with squared blocks of stone cemented together with mortar. To add to the mystery, the stones were of granite rock not found in that area, while the mortar proved to be made of a fine gypsum sand mixed with animal blood. The nearest sand of that type was found only at White Sands, New Mexico!

When the wall was dug away, a tunnel 14 feet square was exposed, but 60' into the tunnel a second stone and mortar wall exactly like the first was encountered. With considerable effort it too was dug away, but 160 feet into the mountain a third stone wall was found. By then all but the most zealous workers had returned to their homes, but Freddie Crystal and a small but dedicated crew continued working. When the third wall was removed, a large chamber with a cement like floor was found, with a maze of tunnels leading from it, each closed off by a solid stone wall. It appeared that White Mountain was honeycombed with tunnels and chambers. To discourage the faint-hearted, deadly traps were encountered, huge delicately balanced boulders triggered when pieces of the stone walls were removed.

The excavation of the mysterious White Mountain had already taken more than two years, with no end of its puzzling underground maze of tunnels in sight. Many who had helped with the digging ran out of money and had to return to their farms or ranches. With no one left to help him, Freddie Crystal left as quietly as he had arrived. If you're a treasure hunter, you can't fail to see the similarity between the White Mountain diggings and the mysterious money pit at Oak Island. Were they both built for the same purpose, and if so, by who? For anyone interested in becoming rich, White Mountain and its Aztec treasure cave is still there. Almost anyone at Kanab can point the way to Montezuma's treasure cave.

Not long after Mormon pioneers settled Utah Valley, they began building settlements at the same places where Fathers Salmeron, Posada and Escalante had camped before them. During their first years in the valley it was a common sight to see Mexican slavers pass through the valley going toward the northwest during the spring of the year and see pack trains loaded with gold and silver ore come down the canyons from the south and east in the fall of the year. Journals of many early settlers describe such slaving or mining parties. One account of 1852 written by Mormon V. Selman is of particular interest. He described how Spanish (Mexican) pack trains carrying gold ore would come down the Provo River Canyon and camp overnight near his little farm. "They would camp by our place for a few days to rest their pack animals. Those mules were loaded with packs which did not look very large, but they were all

they could carry. They kept an armed guard at their camp and no one was allowed near, as if whatever was in those packs was very valuable."

As stated earlier, one of the first actions taken by Brigham Young was to prohibit slavery. In 1852, the same year Selman reported the gold miners camped at his place, Marshal William H. Kimball arrested a party of Mexicans as they were leaving Utah Valley through Spanish Fork Canyon. The slavers reluctantly surrendered the Indian children they had captured, telling the marshal that slaving was the most lucrative business they had engaged in since packing gold ore from the mountains. When questioned further, the slavers told how they had packed gold from the Mine Of The Yutahs in the mountains above Utah Valley, and from other mines on the Provo and Weber rivers, as well as from the Uinta Mountains. Within only a few years after Brigham Young's ban on slavery and with farms closing the old trails, Mexican slavers and ore pack trains were seldom seen. But occasionally a small party or a lone individual would return to the mountains, tempted with the knowledge of certain wealth to be found there. One who returned had been a small boy with the miners who camped at Selman's farm in 1852.

In 1921 an aged Mexican said to be 80 years old came to Provo City where he found employment with a contractor who was building city sidewalks. He proved to be a good worker, but when he received his pay he quit his job and wasn't seen again for several months. Then he came back to his former employer and asked to be rehired. Because he had been a hard worker, he was given his old job, but only to quit when payday came again. A month later he returned once more, but the contractor told him he could not be rehired if he intended to quit again. The old man said that he needed the money badly, for he had travelled a long ways and needed supplies so he could continue his search for an old mine where he had had been with his father long ago. He said that on their last trip to the mine they had taken all of the bullion their mules could carry, but still they had to leave a cache of silver bars behind. They had intended to return, but Indians attacked and killed several of the party not far south of Spanish Fork Canyon, and with the Mormon ban on Mexicans and with settlements at every spring and water hole, they had been afraid to return.

The contractor recognized the similarity of the old man's story and a record which he had read which had been written by Daniel Jones of the Mormon Batallion. Jones, in writing about the annual Mexican pack trains which took gold to Santa Fe told a fascinating tale of "the descendents of Coronado," Mexicans at Santa Fe, who secretly worked mines near Utah Lake and packed their gold and silver south without obtaining a permit to do so, or paying taxes on it. "They went into the north where they worked at mining, keeping silent about it and keeping the gold for themselves, without paying the required tax. Some even took wives among the Indians, and all went well until they had accumulated several million dollars. They started south with their treasure, but the Indians they had treated shamefully at their mines followed, attacking and killing their former masters. They then buried all of the gold. When the annual pack train did not arrive at Santa Fe, their children went north and found the place of massacre, but they could not find the place where the gold was buried."

Quite reluctantly the old man admitted that he had a map which should lead him to the mine; however, he could not find the needed landmarks. The contractor said that he was well acquainted with all of the canyons and mountains nearby, and that if he could look at the map he might be able to help him. The Mexican hesitantly unrolled a piece of goatskin on which the map was drawn, but then changing his mind quickly rerolled it, but not before the contractor got a good look at it. The map was so simple he easily recognized its landmarks. He asked the old man where he had been searching, and when he waved his hand towards Spanish Fork Canyon, the contractor told him he had been looking in the wrong place. Instantly the old man became very angry, saying that he knew more about the mine's location than anyone else, for he had once been there himself. Refusing his employer's help, he stalked away and was never seen around Provo again.

The landmarks on the Mexican's map were very few and easily recognized by anyone familiar with the area. It showed Utah Lake and a river flowing into it. At the river's first fork a valley was shown, beyond which the stream divided and

forked again below two twin peaks. The mine was marked on the left fork below the peaks, where several graves were marked on a ridge. When his job was completed, it took the contractor only a few trips into the mountains before he found the stream forks and the twin peaks, and below them he found a cave-like opening where the ridge dropped sharply to the valley below. The old workings were badly caved, but with help he removed fallen rock from the tunnel and retimbered it with aspen tree trunks.

It soon became obvious that the cavern had been occupied by man over a long period of time, for many animal bones, including several buffalo skulls were uncovered, as well as places where cooking fires had been. The skulls indicated how old the workings were, for buffalo were gone from those valleys before the first Mormons arrived, although early trappers mentioned finding their bones during the early 1800s. Little mineralized rock was found, and no cache of bullion bars, but something very intriguing was dug from the old tunnel. While removing caved rock several old Spanish tools were uncovered, as well as a flat piece of highly polished animal bone, approximately the size of a man's hand. On it was inscribed an exact copy of the map owned by the old Mexican!

The old bone map was exactly and carefully made, correct in its every detail. In addition to the map of Utah Lake and the river with its forks and the twin peaks, it also had a series of lines which later proved to be an exact outline of the tunnels and shafts found in the cavern. It had the outline of nearby mountains inscribed around its edge, and four holes drilled through the bone exactly matched the locations of several other known Spanish mines, including the Josephine Mine on Currant Creek and the Boren and Bethers Mine in Daniels Canyon. The bone map was especially well made, as carefully inscribed as could be done in a modern machine shop, yet it had been found under tons of rock in a cavern where Spanish miners worked in ancient times.

In 1896 Bill Bethers, a Heber City pioneer discovered what he called "hieroglyphics" on a rock in Daniels Canyon, just one canyon northeast of the cavern thought to be the Lost Mine Of The Yutahs. Bill Bethers brought a man "accustomed to reading such signs" to the canyon, where he interpreted them as "representing a figure of a man with his hands thrown up as if suddenly surprised, another as a burro or pack animal, and others perfectly visible but undecipherable." The entire "hieroglyph" was determined to be a guide for miners returning to the canyon after a long absence.

Bethers, with his neighbor Henry Boren, explored the side canyons and ridges near the "hieroglyph" until they found a long abandoned mine working which consisted of two tunnels driven into solid rock, their portals covered with loose rock as though purposely concealed. One of the tunnels was reopened for 75 feet before winter came. Both Boren and Bethers intended to return to the mine in the spring, but the necessity of working their farms took all of their time. Before long both men were called to settle other areas, so the old mine was never explored further.

But the real mystery is how that old bone map, an exact copy of the Mexican's map which we know was ancient, came to be lost, or hidden, under tons of fallen rock in an old mine high above Utah Valley. Whether the cavern is really the Lost Mine of The Yutahs is still unknown, for a lot of work remains to be done before whatever lies beyond its caved workings is known. Hopefully its secret will soon be revealed. But in the meantime, why not try to find where a party of Mexican miners from the old mine where ambushed somewhere along the Old Spanish Trail near the head of Spanish Fork Canyon during the 1850s. You could find a cache where Ute Indians buried several millions in gold from the Lost Mine of The Yutahs!